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## REFORMIST BUDDHIST GROUPS IN THE LATE MEIJI ERA AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRISTIANITY<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This paper explores the attitude towards Christianity among the so-called “New Buddhists” in the late Meiji era, i.e. members and sympathizers of the reformist Buddhist groups *Keiikai* and *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*. Whereas an anti-Christian attitude prevailed among Buddhist intellectuals up to the 1880s and 1890s, the New Buddhists advocated religious tolerance and the unbiased study of religions. By analysing the writings of Furukawa Rōsen and prominent members of the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*, particularly Sakaino Kōyō and Katō Genchi, this paper reconstructs how these Buddhist groups approached Christianity on the basis of comparative and historical studies, and based on their conviction that religion should serve societal goals and be compatible with the scientific knowledge of their times.

Key words: Christianity, “New Buddhism”, Meiji era, Buddhist Puritans

### INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE “MOVEMENT FOR A NEW BUDDHISM” (*SHINBUKKYŌ UNDŌ*)

The focus of this paper is the movement for a so-called “New Buddhism” (*shinbukkyō*) during the late Meiji era,<sup>3</sup> i.e. the activities of the *Keiikai* group

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<sup>3</sup> Sakaino Kōyō provided a brief overview of the history of the term *shinbukkyō* during the Meiji era in his article titled *Meiji bukkyō kaiko* (Sakaino, 1910).

around Furukawa Rōsen (1871–1899), as well as the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* (Association of Buddhist Puritans) under Sakaino Kōyō (1871–1933). Although Nakanishi Ushio (or Ushirō; 1859–1930) had already called for a renewal of Buddhism in the late 1880s and early 1890s, he wanted to do so within the framework of the existing political system and social order of his time (Ikeda, 1976, p. 247).<sup>4</sup> Later Buddhist reformers from the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*, however, took a more critical position towards the government policies and social developments of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Yoshida, 1992, pp. 355f).

This rather narrow definition of the Movement for a New Buddhism is reflected in Ōtani Eiichi's, Yoshinaga Shin'ichi's, and Kondō Shuntarō's recent volume (2016, pp. 28f, 167ff) on modern Buddhism. In contrast, Nakanishi Naoki's study on New Buddhism defines the term in a wider sense that comprises a range of individual Buddhists and Buddhist associations that were active from the 1880s to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these groups and individuals expressed strong criticisms of premodern sectarian Buddhism and shared a goal of reforming Buddhism to align it with modern times (Nakanishi, 2018, pp. i–ii).

Besides their critical stance towards the close alliance between state and religious leaders (as reflected in the 1912 Meeting of the Three Religions [*sankyō kaidō*], for instance), the New Buddhists – in the narrow sense – criticised the non-reformist so-called “old Buddhism” (*kyū bukkyō*) as being too formalised and inadequate for modern times. They also agitated for the moral reform of society. Their main organisational activities involved monthly informal meetings between core members, as well as discussion groups and public lectures directed to a wider audience. The Buddhist Puritans' public lectures and their journal *Shinbukkyō* attracted not only Buddhists from various sects but also “secular” intellectuals, poets and writers such as Itō Sachio (1864–1913) and Aeba Kōsen (1855–1922), artists such as Yūki Somei (1875–1957), and even Unitarian Christians who contributed to the journal or attended the lectures. Due to such connections, Takahashi Hara (2016, pp. 167ff) has characterised New Buddhism as a network that linked the Buddhist intellectual world to its religious, intellectual and artistic surroundings.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion of Nakanishi's understanding of a New Buddhism (*shinbukkyō*) see: Hoshino, 2009.

Examining the relationship of this reformist movement with Christianity is of particular interest, because these groups publicly committed themselves to the principles of religious tolerance and the unbiased exploration of all religions. The following essay will thus illustrate how the New Buddhists of the late Meiji era evaluated Christianity based on these ideals. The analysis will focus on the writings of Furukawa Rōsen – the founder of the *Keiikai* – as well as writings from members of the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*, particularly those of their intellectual leaders Sakaino Kōyō and Katō Genchi (1873–1965).

The emergence of Buddhist groups that sought to revitalise Buddhism in one way or another was a typical reaction to the anti-Buddhist policies of the early Meiji era. The measures taken by the government to institutionally separate Buddhism and Shintō (*shinbutsu bunri*) not only increased solidarity among Buddhists, but also weakened the traditional organisational structures of temple Buddhism. The emergence of associations both between and within different Buddhist sects in the 1870s and 1880s can thus be seen as a new form of Buddhist community building that took the place of the system of temple parishioners (*danka seido*) (Fukushima, 1998, p. 116). Accordingly, most intrasectarian groups were subject to strict rules that were set by their main temple (*honzan*). These groups also often had a pronounced anti-Christian character and attempted to hinder the spread of Christianity through lectures and publications (Futaba, 1977; Nakanishi, 2018, pp. 22–27).

The trend towards the formation of Buddhist associations reached its peak during the mid-1880s. It is not unlikely that these organisations served as role models for the groups of young, academically educated Buddhists that then formed later in the 1890s. These later young Buddhists were shaped by their university educations (usually at one of the two imperial universities in Tōkyō or Kyōto) and by a pronounced generational awareness. As “young people” (*seinen*) – most of the members of the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* were born in the 1870s – and as members of the urban intellectual class, they felt called upon to help shape the “new zeitgeist” (*jidai no shinseishin*) of modern urban society, and to lead Buddhism into a secure future within that society (Fukushima, 1998, pp. 118f).

The young Buddhist’s primary mouthpiece of choice besides public lectures were periodicals: Furukawa Rōsen and the other members of the *Keiikai* published the Buddhist journals *Bukkyō* (Buddhism) and *Hansei zasshi* (English title: The Temperance. A Magazine), while the Buddhist

Puritans published their own journal, *Shinbukkyō*, from 1900 to 1915. Advances in printing technology – from woodblock printing to moveable metal typeface – as well as developments in the postal system during the Meiji era not only led to the emergence of a diverse landscape of periodicals and daily newspapers, but also changed readers' habits from reading out loud and in groups to reading quietly and individually (Nagamine, 1997, pp. 8ff). At the same time, the wide variety of journals, newspapers, and books made information on, and opinions about different religions much more widely available, which created space for a new form of public discussion about religious topics. The religious scholar Fukushima Shinkichi (1998, pp. 119f) has described this practice as a circular process of reception, reflection, and production: scholarly treatises, essays, commentaries, Buddhist literature, and historical sources were read and reflected upon. Based on this reflection, new texts were created that commented and built upon what was read. In turn, these new texts themselves became topics of discussion. Journals and other periodicals thus became a place for theoretical discussions of contemporary religion.

The movement for a New Buddhism surrounding the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* was different in many ways from earlier revival movements in Japanese Buddhism. Its distinctiveness was described by religious scholar Wakimoto Tsuneya in his characterisation of religious-intellectual movements (*shūkyō shisō undō*) in modern Japanese religious history. He sees their central features as a demand for independence from both religious tradition and political authority; a broad interest in the history of ideas, which also included the sciences and other religions; and finally, in the limitation of their impact on society to the educated middle class. They confined their activities to linguistic expression, i.e. to the publication of periodicals and regular lectures, which opened the possibility for reaction and discussion. All of these features may also be seen in the movement for a New Buddhism (Wakimoto, 1980, pp. 5f).

In the same introduction, Wakimoto attributed the formation of these unique movements to the social and cultural changes that accompanied Japan's entry into modernity. In particular, the western ideal of the separation of church and state – as well as efforts to overcome concepts of heresy and bad doctrines (*jakyō*) through the establishment of political rights such as freedom of religion, thought, and speech – changed people's awareness of religion and shifted religious discourse. In addition, educational reforms which led to an overall increase in education levels across

the country meant that more people could take part in such religious movements and discussions than in prior eras (Wakimoto, 1980, pp. 5ff).

As Wakimoto's characterisation suggests, Buddhist reform movements such as the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* emerged against the backdrop of a new "modern" awareness among Buddhist intellectuals that was characterised by a liberal, undogmatic, scientifically engaged, and critical mentality. One expression of this critical spirit was the historical Buddhist research promoted by Murakami Senshō (1851–1929). With the help of Sakaino Kōyō, Murakami began publishing the journal *Bukkyō shirin* (Journal on the History of Buddhism) in 1904. However, while he remained rooted in the Buddhist perspective for his studies, Sakaino rejected such limitations. He called for the objective study of not only the history of Buddhist thought, but also the socio-historical development of Buddhism. As these two examples illustrate, while the motives and intentions behind such historical Buddhist research differed, there was broad agreement among Buddhist reformers and exponents of institutionalised Buddhism that such research was necessary (Ikeda, 1976, pp. 273ff).

## FURUKAWA RŌSEN'S ASSESSMENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Furukawa Rōsen (or Isamu) was a lay *Jōdo shinshū* Buddhist who devoted his short life to reforming the contemporary Buddhism of his time. In 1886, he became a member of the *Hanseikai* society ("The Temperance Association"), which was established by students from the *Nishi Honganji* branch of the *Jōdo shinshū* sect, and whose goal was to morally revitalise society. In 1887, the group began to publish the journal *Hanseikai zasshi*,<sup>5</sup> which was renamed to *Hansei zasshi* in 1892 then changed again to *Chūō kōron* (At the Centre of Public Discussion) in 1899 – the name under which it continues to be published today. The last name change underscored a shift in the journal's thematic orientation: it no longer devoted itself exclusively to Buddhism or to religious themes, but rather took on a more general socio-critical character that it has retained to this day (Sakaino, 1905b, p. 42).

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<sup>5</sup> A recently edited anthology (Akamatsu, 2018) discusses the *Hanseikai zasshi* alongside other Buddhist journals (*Dendōkai zasshi*, *Kaigai Bukkyō Jijō*, *Reichikai Zasshi*, *Kokkyō*) in the context of overall developments in Meiji Buddhism, and even lists their tables of contents.

In 1894, Furukawa founded the *Keiikai* group together with Nishiyori Ichiroku (Kinjirō), Kikuchi Chōfū (Kenjō) (1870–1953), Hōjō Taiyō, Ōkubo Tadasu, and Sugimura Jūō (Sojinkan) (1872–1945). Soon after, the publishers of *Hansei zasshi* – Sakaino Kōyō, Watanabe Kaikyoku (1872–1933) and Sakurai Gichō (1868–1926), as well as Kobayashi Shōsei (1876–1937), Suzuki Daisetz (1870–1966), and Takakusu Junjirō (1866–1945) joined the group. In their statutes, the members described their agenda in the following terms: “. . . to research and reflect upon the important issues of science and religion, to study knowledge, and to educate morally” (Nakanishi, 2018, p. 205).

Especially in essays published in *Bukkyō*, these young Buddhists argued for the establishment of a new Buddhism which, liberated from conservative and superstitious elements, could fulfil its religious and social duties in the present-day world. To this end, they advocated for Buddhism to overcome its dogmatic insistence on traditional doctrines in favour of the historical and critical exploration of Buddhist sources and history (Kashiwahara, 1990, pp. 105ff; Serikawa, 1989, pp. 70–74; Ikeda, 1996, pp. 100–104).

Fukushima Shinkichi (1998, pp. 112f) traced this call for the unprejudiced study of religions – which was referred to as “free study” (*jiyū tōkyū*) – directly to the influence of Unitarian Christians who had begun conducting missions in Japan in 1887, and who themselves propagated the idea of free study. The Unitarians were above all driven by the desire to harmonise Christianity with the enlightened thinking of their time by calling for the scientific examination of their own religion. This represented a rebellion against orthodox trends in Christianity. With this approach, Unitarians sought to react to contemporary criticisms of religion from philosophy and the natural sciences. Because the young Buddhists of the 1890s found themselves in a similar situation, they welcomed the Unitarian calls and placed particular importance on the idea of free study.

The *Keiikai* dissolved after Furukawa’s early death from illness in 1899. However, a desire to continue the group’s work led Sakaino Kōyō to establish the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* in the same year. It is thus legitimate to see Furukawa as a pioneer in the late Meiji era movement for a New Buddhism, and to regard his writings as influential in the movement’s attitude towards Christianity. In addition to other texts, Furukawa dealt with the Christianity of his time in his works *Nijūyonon igo no nidaikyōto* (The Believers of the two Great Religions after Meiji 24) and *Yuniteriankyō o ronzu* (On Unitarianism, 1894).

FURUKAWA RŌSEN'S *NIJŪYONEN IGO NO NIDAIKYŌTO* (1891)

In *Nijūyonen igo no nidaikyōto*, Furukawa described and evaluated the respective situations of Buddhism and Christianity in the Meiji era, and developed a program for the further development of both religions. His underlying motivation for such work was his perception of a general decline in social morals, which had manifested itself in corruption, prostitution and gambling, and raised questions about the extent to which the two religions were meeting their obligation to save society from moral ruin.

This work not only shed light on Furukawa's view of Christianity, but also laid out his criticisms of contemporary Buddhism and his proposals for its reform. With reference to Nakanishi Ushio's *Shūkyō kakumeiron* (On Revolution in Religion, 1889), Furukawa criticised traditional Buddhism as conservative and dogmatic. Its teachings, he claimed, were not based on rationality, while its clergy was more focused on the material than the spiritual. In contrast, a New Buddhism needed to be progressive, civic, social, historical, by which he meant commensurate with historical circumstances, and spiritual. In order to achieve this goal, he believed it was necessary to counter the moral decay of both society as a whole, and Buddhist monks in particular, with concrete measures, and to overcome the ritualism of Buddhist sects. According to Furukawa (1901b, pp. 34ff), the only Buddhists who were really working on such reforms were the roughly 13,000 followers of the *Hanseikai*.

Furukawa saw the necessary reforms in the Buddhism of his time as a matter of social engagement and acknowledged the superiority of Christianity's contributions in this domain. While the Christians needed to improve the theoretical foundations of their claims to the truth, their social activities should be seen as a model for Buddhists, for instance in the areas of prison ministry, the education of the poor, overseas missions, and youth work (Furukawa, 1901b, pp. 36f).

Although Furukawa recognised Christians' charitable and social work, he did not believe it would be enough for the religion to survive in Japan. In his estimation, Christianity had only been able to spread across Japan in the years following the Meiji Restoration, because the religious policies of the new government had weakened Buddhism to the extent that it was no longer a real competitor, and because the entire country had been seized by a fervour for the West that the missionaries had used for their own gain. By the mid-1880s, on the other hand, the trend towards

westernisation started to be countered by references to Japan's national identity and the value of its own culture. At the same time, many influential Buddhists began work to revitalise their religion and its image. In addition to these social shifts, the various Christian confessions increasingly had to deal with criticism from within their own ranks, for instance from the Universalists and the Unitarians, who had questioned the legitimacy of many traditional doctrines (Furukawa, 1901b, pp. 19–25).

In light of Christianity's situation, Furukawa believed it would not survive long in Japan. In response, he listed a series of measures that he believed were necessary in order to ensure that the Christian religion could flourish in Japan. First, he believed it was critically important to align Christian teachings with the standards of rationality, as well as with philosophical and scientific knowledge. In his eyes, this was the path that had been taken by the Unitarians and the Universalists. Just as important was its inculturation, that is, the development of a specifically Japanese form of Christianity that was in harmony with Japanese culture and traditions. He also asserted that Christians should continue to place more value on true faith, instead of just seeking to gain more believers through songs, prayers, and other superficialities. Finally, he advised them to have more tolerance and openness to local religions and their followers, as well as to take a more long-term perspective in their social activities (Furukawa, 1901b, pp. 31ff).

He thus assessed Christianity to be an irrational religion that had been unable to adjust itself to Japan's social and cultural conditions. At the same time, he evaluated in a positive way the work of so-called liberal Christianity, by which he meant the "Allgemeiner Evangelisch-Protestantischer Missionsverein" (General Protestant Mission Association), the Unitarians, and the Universalists.<sup>6</sup> In Furukawa's eyes, their calls for the historical and comparative study of religions, as well as their religious tolerance, could help put the development of Christianity on the right path continuing into the future. He concluded his essay with a bleak vision of a possible future for Japanese Buddhism: if it were unable to create a new, contemporary Buddhism to act as a counterweight, he predicted that Christianity would first adopt a Unitarian, and then a Buddhist character, and that this new form of Christianity would then spread across the globe (Furukawa, 1901b, pp. 41f).

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<sup>6</sup> For more on liberal Christian missionary work, see: Suzuki, 1979, pp. 23–86.



Furukawa's image of Christianity differed only slightly from that of other contemporary Buddhists. Nevertheless, his text is unusual: although he was a staunch Buddhist, he gave Christians advice about how they could help their religion survive in Japan. And while he also criticised Christianity in doing so, he did not do so with polemical intent. He did not reach a conclusion that Christianity was incompatible with Japan, but asserted that it could find even wider acceptance if it were to make the changes that he described. It is important to note that Furukawa prefaced his advice by noting that he was simply trying to address the question of how Christianity could halt its decline in Japan as objectively as possible. This comment suggests that Furukawa made his remarks based on the principle of free study, which called for reflecting on a given topic as objectively and rationally as possible. This ideal not only was a fundamental principle of both the Unitarians and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*, but also was discussed and advocated for by a majority of the religious intellectuals of the time. And among reform Buddhists, it was a central guiding principle in their conceptions of a modern religion.

Furukawa thus judged Christianity as it existed in Japan to be necessary of reform without dismissing it at a fundamental level. He also advocated for the theoretical tenets of Unitarianism, which he saw as neither a part of Christianity, nor a religion at all in a real sense. On the contrary: he saw Unitarianism as a religiously independent and religiously critical entity that sought to encourage all religions to make necessary reforms.

#### FURUKAWA RŌSEN'S *KAIGI JIDAI NI IRERI* (1894)

This assessment was closely connected to his evolutionary model of historical intellectual development, which he presented in his 1894 essay *Kaigi jidai ni ireri* (On the Path to the Era of Doubt). There, he developed a three-step model that he used to describe the history of both philosophical and religious thought. The three phases, which both Buddhism and Christianity were then undergoing in Japan, were the Era of Dogmatism (*dokudan jidai*), the Era of Doubt (*kaigi jidai*) and the Era of Criticism (*hihyō jidai*). According to Furukawa, however, the two religions were developing in different ways. In the case of Christianity, the Era of Dogmatism was marked by the firm conviction that every word of the Bible was true and infallible. But Buddhist criticisms about the irrationality of the Bible had ushered in the Era of Doubt, in which even Christians themselves began questioning their

literal understanding of the Bible. By the time of his essay, Japanese Christians had reached the Era of Criticism, in which they were attempting to find a compromise between their old beliefs and their doubt, for instance by offering new interpretations of the Bible. According to Furukawa, this would then ultimately lead back to a new dogma that would be superior to the previous dogma, but which would also just restart the cycle of doubt and criticism again.

Buddhism, on the other hand, had only just reached the Era of Doubt thanks to the efforts of the New Buddhists. This era was marked, for instance, by discussions about how authentic *Mahāyāna* Buddhism could really be if its sutras were verifiably **not** connected to the historical Buddha. Furukawa was sure that similar problems would emerge as future Buddhists continued their critical investigations of Buddhist history. As part of this process, he claimed that the Unitarians functioned as a bridge between the old and the new dogmas by triggering both doubt and criticism (Furukawa, 1901a, pp. 107–111). This model became widely accepted in Buddhist circles of the time, and was used to justify critical analyses of Buddhism, as well as a reason for renewal and reform.

For the most part, Furukawa's contribution to a rapprochement between Christians and Buddhists was based on his positive appraisal of Unitarianism. Although he did not really regard Unitarians to be Christians, but rather part of a reform movement whose ideas of a modern religion were very similar to his, he was also well aware that they saw themselves as Christians. Moreover, by pointing to similarities in some of their respective fundamental beliefs, he tried to establish a level of rapprochement that remained largely unaffected by doctrinal differences.

## THE ASSOCIATION OF BUDDHIST PURITANS (*BUKKYŌ SEITO DŌSHIKAI*) AND THEIR MOVEMENT FOR A NEW BUDDHISM

After Furukawa's death, Sakaino Kōyō, Tanaka Jiroku (1869–?), Andō Hiroshi (1869–1942), Takashima Beihō (1875–1949), Sugimura Jūō and Watanabe Kaikyoku founded The Association of Buddhist Puritans in 1899 (*Bukkyō seito dōshikai*, renamed in 1903 to *Shinbukkyōto dōshikai*, The Association of New Buddhists). Katō Genchi joined shortly after that. The group saw

itself as a direct successor to the *Keiikai*, while the name Puritans (*seito*) was a conscious reference to the English Puritans, with whom they felt a kinship in their desire to save society in a moral sense. The new association first laid out its fundamental convictions in the following points:

1. We believe in the fundamental principles of Buddhism.
  2. We expect fundamental reforms in society driven by a revitalisation of faith.
  3. We demand the free study of Buddhism.
  4. We reject superstition.
  5. We do not recognise the necessity of retaining the present system of religion.
  6. We reject the protection and control of religion by politics.
- (Takashima, 1910, p. 1057)

This list was updated and modified several times. Ultimately, the group's founding principles were laid out in the first edition of *Shinbukkyō*. The affirmation of Buddhism was side-lined in favour of a more general religious open-mindedness. Instead of demanding the free study of Buddhism, for instance, it called for the free study of religions in general:

1. Our basic principle is a healthy faith (*kenzen naru shinkō*) in Buddhism.
  2. We promote and spread healthy faith, healthy knowledge, and morality, and besides we strive for fundamental social reforms.
  3. We demand the free study of Buddhism and other religions.
  4. We expect the disappearance of all superstition.
  5. We do not accept the necessity to maintain the present religious system and rituals.
  6. We reject any kind of political protection or interference.
- (Wagato no sengen, 1900, p. 6)

The overwhelming popular response to the new association was clearly reflected in the large number of membership requests it received after publishing these principles. According to Takashima, between one and two thousand Buddhists asked to join the group. However, the members decided to keep the association limited to a small circle with strict admission criteria (Sakaino, 1905b, pp. 41ff; Takashima, 1910, pp. 1056–1058). Just as

Furukawa had been, the founders of the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* were convinced of what they saw as the moral decay of society and of the sole ability of religion to stop it. In their 1900 manifesto, they explained that the social reforms they sought to achieve needed to be based on a new morality founded on the basis of the connection between healthy faith and healthy knowledge (*kenzen naru chishiki*). However, Buddhism in its current form could not establish this new morality, which meant that a comprehensive reform of the Buddhist faith was necessary before the religion could fulfil its most important duty. According to the Buddhist Puritans, the foundations of this renewal would lie in the freedom of thought and study, the independence of religion from state interference or protection, the abolition of superstition, tolerance towards other religions and their unbiased exploration, as well as in the union of Buddhism and Christianity (Wagato no sengen, 1900, pp. 3–6).

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF “HEALTHY FAITH” (*KENZEN NARU SHINKŌ*)

But what did they mean by “healthy faith”? According to Katō Genchi, it did not mean adhering to the Buddhist beliefs of earlier generations, such as in the times of the historical Buddha, Shinran (1173–1262) or Nichiren (1222–1282). Instead, religious belief should always be connected to people’s knowledge and experience; as religious belief should guide moral behaviour, it must be appropriately adjusted to contemporary and local conditions. Or should present-day people behave as they did in Shinran’s or Nichiren’s times? The intellectual progress of the past 100 years, seen clearly in the results of both philosophical and scientific research, should thus necessarily lead to a further development of religious faith. The beliefs of historical Buddhist authorities could simply not reflect the knowledge and everyday experiences of contemporary society. The only thing that is immutable, he claimed, is the form of religious belief, namely the concept of good and evil. The content of a religion, on the other hand, must change depending on time and place. This is why he insisted that the new religion would have to be based on the healthy knowledge provided by philosophy and science (Katō, 1900, pp. 8–12).

Sakaino Kōyō extended Katō’s view that religious faith should be in harmony with contemporary knowledge by including the elements of emotionality and individuality. Accordingly, a healthy faith is not purely rational, but rather must satisfy people’s emotional needs as well. Sakaino (1901a, pp. 279f; 1902, pp. 562–567) also left it to the individual to determine the

exact substance of this faith: each individual must have a clear picture of the inviolable foundations and concrete contents of their chosen faith by rationally examining different religions, philosophies and natural sciences with respect to their varying claims to the truth. He rejected the right of traditional teachings and clerical authorities to determine believers' religious convictions, and instead entrusted individuals to make their own determinations. Thus, the New Buddhists advocated for a plurality of religious convictions that – at least according to Sakaino – would still be based on a common foundation, namely the pantheistic world-view of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. They did not seek to establish a new unified doctrine, but rather to realise the principle of individual faith.

As Tanaka Jiroku (1901, p. 280) put it, this form of faith would manifest itself both at the individual level and at the societal level. Not only would it influence the private lives of individual believers, but it would also have an effect on efforts to fulfil religion's duties to society. According to Tanaka, true religious belief differs from superstition in its social ramifications, because the latter is unable to improve social conditions. In the same edition of *Shinbukkō*, Tōru Dōgen (1872–1918) defined superstition as a set of beliefs that call for the religious worship of the past. As a result, such beliefs are unable to satisfy present-day believers either rationally or emotionally. Instead, he argued that each era should develop its own contemporary concept of what to worship based on the religious needs of the people of the time (Tōru, 1901, p. 282).

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF “FREE STUDY” (*Jiyū Tōkyū*)

The foundation of healthy faith was the principle of free study outlined by Katō Genchi. The New Buddhists used this term to denote critical, comparative, and historical religious research. The purpose of such research was to eliminate superstition and to provide a solid foundation for faith. **Critical research** focuses on religious doctrine and traditions, whereas **comparative research** is devoted to the impartial evaluation of the claims of various religions to possess the truth, while **historical research** determines the historical value of each religion (Katō, 1901b, p. 281).<sup>7</sup> However, systematic religious research was only the methodological approach of free study.

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<sup>7</sup> Katō's classification of religious studies was not uncommon in the religious intellectual world of the time. Inoue Tetsujirō also made a distinction between critical, historical, and comparative studies in Buddhist research (Andō, 1896, p. 15).

As an attitude – to use Fukushima’s term (1998, p. 111) – free study was characterised by the principles of rationality and tolerance of the sciences and other religions (Sakaino, 1902, p. 568). Their ideas should be judged free from ideological bias and, if necessary, integrated into one’s own conception of truth. Tolerance was thus seen as a direct consequence of rationality: if reason is the sole criterion of acceptance, it must necessarily lead to an “impartial perspective, a tolerant attitude” toward other religions (Sakaino, 1902, p. 565).

This type of purely rational observation should also be applied to the knowledge of the time, i.e. to the philosophical and scientific knowledge that was taught in schools (Sakaino, 1902, p. 567). In Sakaino’s eyes, as the basis of human rationality, common knowledge was the standard by which New Buddhism’s faith should be measured, as a religion can only spread if it keeps pace with society’s general level of education. Sakaino summarised the necessity for religious doctrines to adjust to a given society’s general level of education using two terms: the “principle of parallelism between education and religion” (*kyōiku shūkyō heikō shugi*) and the “principle of common knowledge” (*jōshiki shugi*) (Sakaino, 1902, p. 567). The important elements of free study as an attitude were thus rationality, tolerance, and the consideration of the “common knowledge of the time” (pp. 565–568).

Moreover, Sakaino also justified the postulate of religious tolerance on the basis of his fundamental understanding of religion: he regarded religiousness as a natural and necessary imperative for every human being, regardless of their degree of civilisation. Just as humans have to eat to survive, they need religion to give meaning to their lives. And like the diversity of different foods that exist in the world, so too there is a large number of different religions. Still, they are all rooted in the same anthropological condition, which is why every religion should be treated with the same respect, neutrality and tolerance. This does not mean, of course, that there are no qualitative differences between them. After all, foods differ in their nutritional value, their agreeableness, etc. Likewise, there are differences between religions: some contain more truth, or have fewer superstitious elements than others (Sakaino, 1902, pp. 566f). Still, in his call for religious tolerance, Sakaino recognised the broad equality of all religions.

In summary, we can characterise the theoretical basis for the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai*’s understanding of religion as a distinctly evolutionary and historical way of thinking. The contents of religious faith were relativised

by demonstrating the past adaptation of religions to the changes and intellectual development of mankind, and by demanding such adaptations take place in the present. The Buddhist Puritans considered the advances in science and philosophy to be the defining characteristics of their own era, from which they derived their demand for the analysis of religion with the help of scientific methods. Accordingly, their basic principles evoked the central values of science: objectivity, freedom of research and thought, independence from state interference, and tolerance towards other perspectives. However, the call for neutral and rational religious consideration was only a means to an end: it was supposed to create the necessary foundation for a contemporary religious faith. This in turn was a necessary prerequisite for religion to be able to fulfil its actual task, namely its responsibility for the moral state of society. The Buddhist Puritans thus propagated a civic, socially committed Buddhism. At the same time, they accused the Buddhist intellectuals from the previous generation of seeking the legitimacy of Buddhism more in the realm of philosophical speculation than in its social activities.

Apart from this, the New Buddhist movement was not only significant in the history of Japanese Buddhism because of its practical and contemporary understanding of religion. Their attitude towards other religions also marked a historic turning point. As described above, they advocated for free study to be applied not only to one's own religion but also to others, in order to discover their truths and historical value. A good example of what the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* understood as an impartial historical analysis of religion may be found in an essay by Sakaino on the intrinsic differences between Buddhism and Christianity published in the January 1905 edition of *Shinbukkyō*. In it, Sakaino argued that the essence of a religion – unlike politics, education, or philosophy – is primarily shaped by the personality of its founder, and indeed by his entire personality. Although later followers may have changed certain characteristics of Buddhism, for example, the religion was so strongly influenced by the historical Buddha that they could not have completely changed the face of the religion. Accordingly, the different characteristics of Buddhism and Christianity were rooted in the different personalities of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni and Jesus.

Sakaino believed that such historical circumstances were much more responsible for the difficulties between Christianity and Buddhism than doctrinal differences (such as their different concepts of God). Historical observation could thus contribute to an understanding of the origins of the

incompatibilities between the two religions. Sakaino characterised Jesus as a man of action who was young, hot-blooded, and intolerant of Judaism (he references Jesus' appearance in the Temple of Jerusalem) who led a heroic but sad life that ended tragically. And like Jesus' life, he claimed, the history of Christianity was also marked by heroism, active religious fervour, and tragedy. This could be seen in historical events such as the fate of the Christians under the Roman Emperor Nero (37–68, r. 54–68), the martyrs, and the Crusades. Sakaino considered the active spirit of Christianity to be its great advantage, while at the same time saw its penchant for passion and its lack of rationality as its primary disadvantages. In contrast, he saw Shakyamuni as a calm, patient, and gentle man with a clear conviction. Although he too had had an exceptional ardency of faith, it was not accompanied by youthful impetuosity, but rather by composure. And his long, peaceful life ended in a gentle death. Accordingly, Buddhism was also a quiet, less passionate religion. Sakaino saw this peace and tranquillity as the strengths of Buddhism, whereas its weaknesses lay in the extremes of passivity and indifference.

As Sakaino emphasised, the aim of this portrayal was not to judge the correctness or falsity of Buddhist and Christian teachings. Instead, his concern was simply to present the strengths and weaknesses of the respective religions and their historical roots in the personalities of Shakyamuni and Jesus (Sakaino, 1905a, pp. 15–20). With their postulate of unbiased religious study, the New Buddhists overcame the apologetic attitude that had characterised most Buddhist intellectuals' thinking in the Meiji era until then. They were no longer interested in following the principle *haja kenshō* (destruction of the false, establishment of the correct doctrine) by proving that the teachings of their own religion were true while those of others (especially those of Christianity) were in error. On the contrary, with the help of free study the New Buddhists wanted to recognise the truths in all religions and to integrate them into their new faith.

#### THE IDEA OF A POTENTIAL UNION OF BUDDHISM AND CHRISTIANITY

It was with this in mind that they also spoke of a potential union between Buddhism and Christianity:

We do not believe that truth only exists in Buddhism. Truth fills the universe and the human mind (*jinshin*). Can't truth be discovered wherever things exist and the human mind shows itself? How much more then in the vastness



of Christianity! We expect the union (*gōitsu*) of Buddhism and Christianity, because we do not confuse prejudices with faith. (Shinbukkyō to shinshūkyō, 1900, p. 140)

The New Buddhists' hope for a union of the two religions (Wagato no sengen, 1900, p. 5) was supported by a convergence between their own reform ideas and those of the Unitarians that had already been noted by Furukawa. In 1901, Katō Genchi noted a growing gap between the conservative and the progressive schools of both Buddhism and Christianity. He saw the Unitarians and the Buddhist Puritans as representatives of the progressive schools in their respective religions. He placed more importance on their intellectual and moral kinship (i.e. their agreement on fundamental principles such as freedom of thought, the rejection of religious prejudices and intolerance, universal charity, and the equality of all human beings) than he did on their attachment to their respective religious traditions. While the unification of the two movements was still purely intellectual, Katō argued that over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it would take on concrete features and lead to the emergence of a completely new religion that would leave behind the superstitions of the old religions. In this way, the hostility between Buddhism and Christianity as it existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would be overcome; instead of one religion prevailing against the other, forward-looking ideas for the future would prevail in both religions (Katō, 1901a, pp. 7–11).

Katō's prophecy of a future union of Buddhists and Christians into a new religion was thus based exclusively on the "ideological" proximity of the Buddhist Puritans and the Unitarians. The good relations between the two reform movements could also be seen in the tangible way they dealt with each other. On April 7, 1901, for instance, Sugimura Jūō, Sakaino Kōyō, Katō Genchi, Tōru Dōgen, and others visited the Unitarian's assembly building *Yuiitsukan* to listen to Sunday lectures and to distribute a special edition of *Shinbukkyō*. They also took the opportunity to talk with the Unitarians about their respective understandings of religion, and decided to hold a joint conference in the autumn of the following year; a plan that ultimately never came to fruition (Bukkyo seito dōshikai to yunitarian kyōkai, 1901, pp. 66f). The friendly relationship between the two groups was also reflected in the fact that the Unitarians allowed the New Buddhists to use their assembly building for their monthly lectures. Indeed, the New Buddhists took advantage of the offer from 1901 to 1912 (Wakimoto, 1984, p. 9).

Despite this close relationship, the two movements never united. From the beginning, writers pointed out the difficulty of harmonising Christian monotheism with the pantheistic foundations of Buddhism. An editorial in the November 1900 edition of *Shinbukkyō* revealed both the similarities and the fundamental differences between the New Buddhists and the Unitarians:

There are people who call us Buddhist Unitarians. The Unitarians are a new religion originally based solely on Christianity. Still, we do not necessarily have an aversion to this name. We differ from the Unitarians only in that we are pantheists . . . But the Unitarianism that speaks of the free study of religions, that asserts the omnipresence of truth, that considers every religion with an impartial gaze, and that has impacted Japan's intellectual world, is a close friend of ours. (*Shinbukkyō* to *shinshūkyō*, 1900, p. 141)

Sakaino Kōyō also dedicated a May 1901 essay to the relationship between monotheism and pantheism. He started from the assumption that it is religion's duty to endow human life with coherent meaning and, based on that meaning, to harmonise people's actions, thoughts and feelings. Religion thus has to do justice to both the intellect and the emotions, for both are inseparably connected. The rational needs of human beings are expressed, for example, through scientific analysis and the explanation of natural phenomena. On the other hand, aesthetic perception (such as the pleasure of a sunrise) reveals the human sense of beauty that emerges from emotionality. This sense of beauty leads people to view natural phenomena not solely analytically, but rather to see them as the workings of a supreme power, i.e. to perceive them as created. Christian monotheism, with its assertion of a creator, is consistent with this perception. In this sense, monotheism expresses the emotional side of man. If we were to examine this feeling in detail, however, Sakaino claimed that we would inevitably come to the rational conclusion that God was not the creator, but rather that Buddhist pantheism, i.e. the identity of differentiation (in phenomena) and equality (in their essence), describes the true nature of the world. Pantheism thus reveals the rational side of man. Notwithstanding, both sides of man are inseparably linked to one another, and both ways of looking at things are rooted in human nature, which is a combination of intellect and emotion (Sakaino, 1901b, pp. 289–295). In this sense, he claimed that monotheism is merely a form of the emotional perception of a reality that pantheism is able to explain at the rational level.

With this interpretation, Sakaino believed he had solved the problem of the incompatibility between monotheism and pantheism. However, his solution did not acknowledge the truth of the Christian belief in a creator. Even for such liberal Christians as the Unitarians, this interpretation was ultimately unacceptable. In this interreligious intellectual discourse, the similarities between the two reform movements did not have enough weight to overcome the fundamental differences in the Buddhist and Christian worldviews. Sakaino himself later expressed, in a 1912 essay, his realisation that a union between the two religions would be impossible:

Buddhist history is a lesson in tolerance. But tolerance does not mean a lack of principles. Tolerance does not mean to regard one's own centre as empty and to surrender it to another power, to unite with it. Rather, it is the ability to absorb the benefits of the external environment without losing one's core. In general, survival requires a resilience (*haisekiryoku*) that seeks to eliminate threatening dangers. We also need to be able to take in nourishment to strengthen and nurture our constitution. Every life is rooted in these abilities to resist and receive. When it comes to religion, it is not that Christianity has no receptivity at all, but rather that the characteristic of resistance is especially pronounced in this religion. Buddhism also has resilience, but in its case, receptiveness is particularly developed. These are the qualities that the two religions have developed throughout their histories, the historical characteristics upon which most of their lives depend. On the whole, Christianity has experienced oppression since its inception; it is a religion whose history has been written with the blood of the martyrs. In addition, it has not encountered any other form of thinking in its surroundings that it could have absorbed. It adopted the ideas of Greek philosophy on a large scale, but in religious terms it encountered only intellectually inadequate religions such as Greek and Roman polytheism . . . This is why Christianity finally overcame those religions. Its history is one of resistance and conquest. Buddhism, on the other hand, has never experienced oppression since its inception. When it was still in its infancy, however, it encountered Brahmanism (Hinduism), a product of the profound thinking of the Indians, and when it came to China it encountered Confucianism and Daoism. Because it encountered such wholesome "food" in all directions, Buddhism did not conquer and resist, but rather eagerly absorbed, and thus strengthened its own constitution. This distinctive receptivity is known as the principle of tolerance. If it were to disappear, Buddhism would quickly lose its life, because a Buddhism without an inner core is not Buddhism.

Japan's religious world is now a stage on which the stormy spectacle of Christian resistance and Buddhist receptivity is taking place. I believe that both

Buddhists and Christians are well aware of their positions. Some scientists have occasionally dreamed of founding a new religion. There are even some who go so far as to believe that it must be possible to create a new religion by identifying and objectively exploring the commonalities between the different religions. But I disagree with that view. The content of a religion is not only determined by its teachings; it also pulsates with the warm blood of its founders, and its historical reality is grounded in the efforts and thinking of many exalted persons. Religion's cold and empty theological shape is lifeless. This is why I do not believe the development of a new religion is as easy as in scientists' dreams, nor that a union of all religions is possible at all.

And even if such a union were possible, it would only be possible in the form of an overcoming and a being overcome. But it is also a mistake to believe that a single way of thinking can overcome and unite all others; it is a ridiculous fantasy that is ultimately unrealisable. If we disregard such ideals and fantasies, the stage of Japanese religion is ultimately a scene of rivalry between Buddhism and Christianity. Both have their own histories and go back to extraordinary, holy founders. Christians will in all likelihood continue to try to overcome Buddhism and to provoke conflict. Buddhism, on the other hand, will probably continue to adopt those elements of Christianity which are superior to it, and it will not react to attacks but will rather increase its own strength. Isn't that itself a gratifying, a great phenomenon? . . . This is my attitude as a Buddhist towards Christianity and my expectations for the future, and this is how I understand the Buddhist principle of tolerance. (Sakaino, 1912, pp. 63ff)

## CONCLUSION

The movement for a New Buddhism supported by the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* was a reaction to the growing influence of the scientific approach towards both the world and religion among intellectual and educated religious circles. The impulses for this development came from the reception of English and French liberalism, utilitarianism, and evolutionary theories in the first half of the Meiji era, and of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century German philosophy starting in the 1890s (Fukushima, 1998, p. 114). The young lay Buddhists of the *Keiikai* and the *Bukkyō seito dōshikai* sensed a discrepancy between this "modern", critical intellectuality on the one hand and the scholarship of the Buddhist sects on the other, which focused their attention exclusively on their own religious traditions and regarded

only the sacred figures of their individual sects to be binding authorities. Their criticism, however, was not limited to studies on institutionalised Buddhism. With their demands for the separation of religion and politics and for religious tolerance, they also sought to implement “modern” Western values. Their call for a New Buddhism was thus an attempt to adapt Buddhism to the evolution of Japan’s intellectual history in order to ensure its continued survival and social influence.

They differed from the Buddhists of the generation before them above all in that they rejected an apologetic attitude. They countered the previously dominant *haja kenshō* concept – which was based on a notion of bad and true religions – with their principle of free study. This was their fundamental contribution to rapprochement between Buddhists and Christians in Japan. By recognising the truth in other religions, and by calling for these truths to be assimilated into their own faith, they created a strong foundation for religious tolerance. In the case of both Sakaino and Katō, this approach was shaped by Western theological research and philosophy, and was based on the belief that religion was the product of an inherent human desire. As a result, all religions could be traced back to a single origin. The early hopes for a union of Buddhism and Christianity into a new religion that would unite the elements of truth from both were based above all on commonalities between New Buddhists and Unitarians. In their ideas of reform and in their advocacy of rationality, free study, and religious tolerance, both sides saw a common foundation that they felt was more important than doctrinal differences. However, both sides underestimated religious loyalty: the Buddhists refused to renounce their pantheistic cosmology, and the Unitarians did the same with their monotheistic image of God.

Nevertheless, the movement for a New Buddhism was the expression of a new consciousness among Buddhist intellectuals. The self-image of the New Buddhists was as strongly influenced by the reception of Western science as it was by Buddhist traditions. They thus adopted elements of Western modernity to help them change their own religious tradition so that it could meet the intellectual needs of the times. In so doing, they placed a higher value on science than on religious traditionalism. This emphasis was at least partially due to the fact that the New Buddhists were primarily academically educated lay people and not monks like Shimaji Mokurai (1838–1911) or Murakami Senshō. As a result, they were less committed than their counterparts to the institutions and doctrines of their respective sects. Despite their scientific orientation, however, they

ultimately remained bound to their religion; it was not without reason that even among the New Buddhists, the term New Buddhism prevailed over the term New Religion. The New Buddhists' scope of influence was also limited to intellectual circles; within this context they were influential. Despite this, their very concept of healthy faith made it clear that they were addressing an audience that needed to be educated and intellectually flexible. Unlike their European namesakes, the Buddhist Puritans were anything but a popular religious movement.

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## GLOSSARY OF JAPANESE NAMES AND TERMS

Aeba Kōson	饗庭篁村
Andō Hiroshi	安藤弘
Bukkō	佛教
Bukkō seito dōshikai	仏教清徒同志会
Bukkō shirin	仏教史林
Chūō kōron	中央公論
danka seido	檀家制度
dokudan jidai	独断時代
Fukushima Shinkichi	福島信吉
Furukawa Rōsen (Isamu)	古川老川(勇)
gōitsu	合一
haiseikiryoku	排斥力
haja kenshō	破邪顕正
Hansei zasshi	反省雑誌
Hanseikai	反省会
Hanseikai zasshi	反省会雑誌
hihyō jidai	批評時代
Hōjō Taiyō	北条大洋
honzan	本山
Itō Sachio	伊藤左千夫
jakyō	邪教
jidai no shinseishin	時代の新精神
jinshin	人心



jiyū tōkyū	自由討究
Jōdo shinshū	浄土真宗
jōshiki shugi	常識主義
kaigi jidai	懷疑時代
Kaigi jidai ni ireri	懷疑時代に入れり
Katō Genchi	加藤玄智
Keiikai	経緯会
kenzen naru chishiki	健全なる知識
kenzen naru shinkō	健全なる信仰
Kikuchi Chōfū (Kenjō)	菊池長風 (謙讓)
Kobayashi Shōsei	小林正盛
kyōiku shūkyō heikō shugi	教育宗教並行主義
kyū bukkyō	旧仏教
Murakami Senshō	村上専精
Nakanishi Ushio	中西牛郎
Nichiren	日蓮
Nijūyonen igo no nidaikyōto	二十四年以後の二大教徒
Nishi Honganji	西本願寺
Nishiyori Ichiroku (Kinjirō)	西依一六 (金次郎)
Ōkubo Tadasu	大久保格
Sakaino Kōyō	境野黄洋
Sakurai Gichō	桜井義肇
sankyō kaidō	三教会同
seinen	青年
Shimaji Mokurai	島地默雷
Shinbukkyō	新佛教
shinbukkyō undō	新仏教運動
Shinbukkyōto dōshikai	新仏教徒同志会
shinbutsu bunri	神仏分離
Shinran	親鸞
Shūkyō kakumeiron	宗教革命論
shūkyō shisō undō	宗教思想運動
Sugimura Jūō (Sojinkan)	杉村従横 (楚人冠)
Suzuki Daisetz	鈴木大拙
Takakusu Junjirō	高楠順次郎
Takashima Beihō	高島米峰
Tanaka Jiroku	田中治六
Tōru Dōgen	融道玄

Wagato no sengen  
Watanabe Kaikyoku  
Yuiitsukan  
Yūki Somei  
Yuniteriankyō o ronzu

我徒の宣言  
渡辺海旭  
唯一館  
結城素明  
ユニテリアン教を論ず